

tecture and boat building, for fencing ... and the bark was even used for tanning leather.

“White Oak Land” was what they once called the Town of Lisbon, where the hoary giants grew out of the clay and limestone marl above beds of limestone. When the pioneer Weaver families came to Lisbon, they found “large oaks, tall pines, prairie grasses, with wild bands of Indians and their ponies.”

But the most ornamental of our oaks were the gnarly burr oaks. “Nothing can surpass their graceful beauty,” wrote Dr. P. R. Roy, local naturalist, a century ago. “Especially if they are left to grow free, following their laws of development.”

These were the trees of our unforgettable burr oak openings. Their large top-heavy leaves, dark green above and bright silvery white below, made the tree fairly sing when they riffled in the winds. Their wood was tough, close grained and more durable than white oak, especially when exposed to frequent changes of moisture and drying.

● Over in Eagle, the terrain is made up of springs, brooks, marshes, hills, prairies and burr oak openings. When Eagle’s first settler Ahira R. Hinkley came, he started from Milwaukee with his brother Henry and a sturdy Quaker, Andrew Scofield. They left Milwaukee with two yokes of oxen and a wagon load of supplies, to search of the best place to stake their claims. They encountered mud and almost impassable hills, taking three days to reach Mukwonago.

After spending the stormy night with David Orendorf in his roofless cabin, they started west along an Indian trail for Eagle Prairie. Suddenly from a hilltop, they looked down on the most beautiful strip of countryside they had ever seen! A huge spring sparkled on the prairie; and surrounding it was an oak opening so lovely it looked like a park.

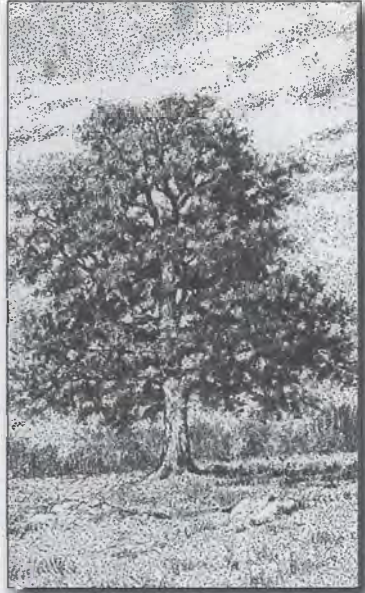
Each man decided in his own mind that this spot would be his. Deliberately Hinkley walked over to the nearest burr oak tree and carved his initials in it ... the unwritten law of those days made the simple gesture all that was necessary for it to be his.

When Scofield saw what his friend had done, he said in his quiet voice: “Hira, thee is very quick with thy knife.” But they

soon found another claim close by for Andrew, Ahira even lending him the hundred dollars to pay for it.

Oak openings were little worlds of their own. Several stories are told of the birds' activities among the burr oaks.

One of the few golden eagles ever seen in our county was found nesting in the triple forked branch of a huge burr oak tree in 1853. A Cooper's hawk nested in the huge oaks, destroying quail and grouse. Northern butcher birds (shrikes) lived among the oaks all winter, feeding on field mice and small birds.



Professor Roy recorded a strange migration of night hawks on September 10, 1850: Two hours before dark, night hawks formed a continuous flock, moving south. He said they reminded him of a moving flock of passenger pigeons.

Ordinarily most warblers nest in underbrush close to the ground but a group of mysterious Tennessee warblers literally swarmed here in the middle of May of 1849. They thronged in the oaks and adjoining groves, then disappeared. Not a single one was seen again for the next two years!

Professor Roy recorded the activities among the oak openings in 1862, including not only the season's first appearance of birds and flowers, but activities of the sky overhead.

In March, he saw and heard wild geese on the 7th; a severe thunderstorm on the 8th; meadowlarks on the 10th; "robins" on the 11th; "Star of Bethlehem just up" on the 12th; hurricanes on the 13th and 14th; a beautiful "aurora with streamers" (northern lights) on the 17th; and tiger lilies peeking out of the ground on the 24th.

In April, anemones first blossomed on the 2nd, and gooseberries were in leaf; wild pigeons were seen on the 14th; ground ivy



THE JOHN KLINE HOME IN THE TOWN OF EAGLE IS SURROUNDED BY OAK TREES IN THIS RARE AND VERY OLD PHOTOGRAPH FROM THE WAUKESHA COUNTY MUSEUM ARCHIVES.

PHOTO FROM THE WAUKESHA COUNTY MUSEUM COLLECTION

bloomed on the 21st, there was an arched aurora at 9 p.m., and bloodroots first bloomed on the 22nd. On the 29th there was “a rainbow in the west at 5 1/2 a.m.”

On May Day, the Dutchman’s Breeches opened; May 4 and 5, the Hoodleafed Violet and Solomon’s Seal bloomed. The big burr oaks themselves were in leaf on the 10th, towering over the delicate pink spring beauties just opening at their feet. The first Baltimore oriole was seen among the oaks that day, too. On the 17th the black and white oaks leafed out. The next two days saw the columbine, mandrake and blue-eyed grass in bloom.

“June 22, Trilliums in flower. 24th, Harebells in flower.”

Cicadas sang among the corky ridged twigs of the burr oaks, the hottest day of that year, July 21st. The first snowflakes fluttered onto their rusty maroon leaves Nov. 6th, 1862.

